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The Concealed Revealed: The ‘afterlives’ of hidden objects in the home

Introduction

The shoe lives in a Fox’s biscuit tin in the pantry. Its custodian is Laura, an American Media Relations Manager at the University of East Anglia, living in a Norfolk village with her husband and two young sons. She wants to keep the shoe safe from pets, children, and the elements, but has plans to display in the future: perhaps in a glass case in pride of place on the mantelpiece. When Laura does take the shoe out of the tin, she does so gingerly, tentatively, and while she enjoys showing it to visitors, who are often eager to see it, she worries about its preservation. ‘I thought it’s probably quite delicate so it needs somewhere quite safe and tucked away,’ she told the author. ‘That said my children are absolutely enthralled with it as well, they love it...They’re very good, they won’t go and play with it, but they do like to bring it out and tell people about it.’ Laura smiles as she admits, ‘It is my best party trick so far and I have just gone to town with the shoe story. It’s going to be my living legacy.’

Laura’s words and her treatment of the shoe speak of care, of affection, even – to an extent – of reverence. And yet, to both the untrained *and* trained eye, it is a fairly ordinary shoe (Figure 1). Old, certainly – experts at the Northampton Shoe Museum have dated it to the 19th century – but still there is nothing particularly remarkable about its appearance. A well-worn and damaged ankle boot, with a side fastening, a thin leather sole, and fabric upper, which, judging by its size, was probably made for a child or young adult. So what makes this shoe special enough for Laura to feel the need to cherish it so highly and safeguard it so protectively?

It was not the shoe of one of Laura’s ancestors, retained out of sentimentality; nor is it known to have belonged to any historical figure of note, retained for posterity. In fact, the identity of its original owner is completely unknown, and almost certainly of no filial connection with Laura. So why, then, she does feel inclined to keep it ‘safe and tucked away’; why are her

children ‘enthralled with it’; and why does she declare it, only half in jest, her ‘living legacy’? The answer lies in its enigmatic provenance: it was found up the chimneybreast of Laura’s 19th-century house, most likely having been deliberately hidden there at some point in the past. Laura’s shoe is a concealed deposit.

This paper is concerned with how such an object – seemingly innocuous, economically worthless, and ostensibly alienable – can, through its status as a concealed deposit, generate a range of emotions in people today, and how it acts as mediator between the past from which it has come and the present in which it finds itself.

Introducing the Concealed Deposit

The concealed deposit is a broad categorisation; it is applied to objects that appear to have been deliberately concealed for no obviously practical purpose and probably with no intention of retrieval. The nature of the location of concealment should discount accidental loss and simple storage before a find is interpreted as having been purposely secreted away and subsequently designated a concealed deposit. Locations therefore include – but are not restricted to – under floorboards, hearthstones, and thresholds; within walls; above doors and ceilings; and up chimneybreasts. The locations can sometimes give an indication of when the objects were concealed, coinciding with the construction or modification of a building feature; in such cases it appears that concealment nearly always pre-dates the 20th century.

Concealed deposits are usually discovered during renovations or demolitions, in a wide range of buildings: cottages, townhouses, barns, manor houses, churches, schools, factories, and so on. The concealed deposits themselves represent even greater variety, ranging from animal remains to artfully crafted figurines. Some deposits (e.g. shoes) are easier to date than others

(e.g. animal remains), but generally speaking it appears that most concealed deposits hail from the 18th and 19th centuries, with some dating earlier than this but very few dating later.

The most recent and comprehensive overview of concealed deposits is Ronald Hutton's edited volume *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery, and Witchcraft in Christian Britain*.¹ This comes nearly 30 years after the publication of the first book to consider the topic in depth: Ralph Merrifield's seminal 1987 *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*.² Merrifield looked primarily at concealed deposits in England, but later studies have demonstrated their worldwide reach, with Ian Evans examining the custom of concealment in Australia, M. Chris Manning in the US, and Sonja Hukantaival in Finland.³

Evidently the concealment of deposits was a widespread practice. However, very few literary sources have been identified which specify why people concealed these items. As such we have only theories, the most common being that the concealed deposit was intended as an apotropaic device, secreted away in the liminal – and thus most vulnerable – locations of a building to ward off malevolent forces and protect the occupants. However, alternative theories abound. Were the objects deposited as foundation sacrifices? Were they intended to ensure luck or fertility? More specifically, was the concealed cat employed to scare natural or supernatural vermin – or both? Was the shoe intended to repel malevolent forces or lure and trap them? Or were they concealed out of sentimentality; an item of clothing once owned by a deceased family member?

It is far beyond the capabilities of this paper to adequately summarise the complex theories behind concealment; it is also beyond its remit, as the author is less concerned with the original purposes of these concealed deposits than with *contemporary* perceptions of them. However, original purposes obviously do play a role in contemporary perceptions. How a finder views

and treats a concealed deposit can depend on what they know or believe about the custom of concealment.

Sometimes the finders have only personal theories, but in most cases some form of research has been conducted: the finder has a mystery on their hands and now they want answers. Generally speaking, though, they do not turn to academic articles published in obscure journals or to jargon-heavy theses in their search for answers. Instead they resort to a resource that is far more accessible to the general public: the Internet. Therefore in order to understand how theories concerning the original purposes of concealment influence contemporary perceptions, the following section will introduce the more frequently-occurring categories of concealed deposits and their popular interpretations.

Interpreting the Concealed Deposit

Concealed deposits are not an exclusive group; their forms are many and varied, including figurines, garments, bottles, written materials, coins, clay-pipes, agricultural tools, and organic items such as seeds. However, some objects were clearly more popular than others, and will therefore be explored in more detail – such as the shoe.

Shoes were first recognised as a category of concealed object in the 1950s when June Swann, former Keeper of the Boot and Shoe Collection at Northampton Museum, noticed a pattern in the finds being donated to her department: a range of men's, women's, and children's footwear, dating primarily to the 18th and 19th centuries, discovered in unusual locations within buildings. Swann subsequently instigated the *Index of Concealed Shoes* at Northampton, which began its life in 1969 as a catalogue of 129 such finds and currently stands at close to 2000. These shoes

are often found as singles rather than pairs, and are nearly always old and well-worn, testifying to heavy use as footwear prior to concealment.⁴

How would the finder of a concealed shoe interpret their find? Having discovered it up their chimney, for example, they might resort to an online search engine such as *Google*; upon typing in the words ‘found shoe up chimney’, one of the first pages they would probably (allowing for personalized searches) be directed to is the *Wikipedia* article on ‘Concealed shoes’. Here, under the subtitle of ‘Explanations’, is a list of possible purposes for the concealed shoe, including its use as a ‘fertility charm’, its employment ‘to protect against evil influences such as demons, ghosts, witches, and familiars’, its ability to trap witches and demons, and its capacity to attract benevolent household spirit.⁵ Regardless of the complex debates surrounding these theories, this *Wikipedia* article is likely one of the primary resources turned to – and accepted – by many finders of concealed shoes.

Another frequently-occurring concealed deposit is the animal: the remains of chickens, dogs, donkeys, bulls, rabbits, sheep, and – notably widespread – horse skulls.⁶ One of the most common is the cat, found bricked up in walls or sealed beneath floorboards and hearthstones, becoming dried or mummified over time via natural processes. Sometimes the cat is accompanied by a rat or a mouse, equally mummified. As both Margaret Howard and Hoggard acknowledge, some cats may have been accidentally enclosed, and therefore do not constitute concealed deposits, but the locations of others (e.g. sealed in an air-tight space beneath a hearthstone) as well as their quite deliberate placements (e.g. in a hunting pose) suggest that some at least were deliberately concealed.⁷

A search for ‘found cat under fireplace’ on *Google* leads to Hoggard’s website *Apotropaios*; a useful resource for research into any of the common categories of concealed deposits. Under the subtitle ‘Dried Cats’ Hoggard writes his balanced interpretation of cat concealment:

‘Clearly there was some strong notion that concealing the animal would serve a purpose, which was almost certainly some kind of protective magic – whether as a ‘foundation sacrifice’ or as a form of pre-emptive counter-magic’.⁸

This identification of the custom of concealment with protective magic dominates interpretations of these deposits, regardless of their form – whether they are cats, shoes, or any other puzzling object secreted away within the fabric of a building. This applies to both web resources and scholarly works, and undoubtedly colours the perceptions of finders, seeking to unravel the mystery of their finds.

Ritual Recycling Reconsidered

Concealed deposits are not inherently ‘magical’. From the shoe to the cat, these were not originally crafted or conceived as objects with ritual or magical purposes.⁹ They existed as something else entirely, something secular, mundane or utilitarian, before they were ‘ritually recycled’ as concealed deposits.¹⁰ The shoe was worn; the clay-pipe smoked; the crockery eaten from; and the animals probably served functional purposes – whilst also existing with their own agencies – before being concealed.

In applying the processual notion of the ‘biography’ of objects to concealed deposits, it becomes evident that they undergo a wealth of recontextualizations; they *become* rather than *are* deposits through processes of adaptation, reutilization, and redefinition.¹¹ They shift mutably from one context to another. However, it is important to remember that these processes of recycling – the adapting, reutilizing, and redefining – are human activities; the concealed deposit does not recontextualize itself.¹² Therefore the biographies of such deposits are

intrinsically linked with the people they come into contact with: their makers, owners, and concealers.¹³

Owen Davies adopts this biographical approach with a flint axe, which deserves to be quoted in full:

A flint axe made 5000 years ago is left where it was discarded at a woodland site by its first possessor. Nearly three millennia later, it is found and placed under the threshold of an Iron Age roundhouse. Then it is picked up by a Roman farmer's wife a century later. She travels several miles to a Romano-Celtic temple one day and leaves it as a votive offering to the gods. A millennium passes and it is turned up by a ploughman and placed in the thatch of a barn to protect it from fire. A late nineteenth-century antiquarian comes across it when looking at old vernacular buildings. He purchases it from the farmer and puts it in his collection, and then decades later his collection is given to a local museum. Here it is put on display and labelled as a Neolithic axe from the area.¹⁴

Davies' hypothetical account of this flint axe not only demonstrates the myriad uses and users an object can encounter throughout its 'life', but also how a lack of awareness of its complex biography can lead to oversimplified interpretations.

If a shoe was made in, say, 1850, worn throughout the following decade, then concealed in 1860, it would be logical to examine the shoe not just as it was created, but also as it was used and as it was redefined upon concealment. In order to contextualise this shoe and understand the recycling it had undergone, equal attention would need to be given to its maker, wearer, and concealer, whether the same or different people. There is, however, another person who has perpetuated the contextual recycling of this shoe; a person who has received relatively little scholarly attention in the past, including from the author herself, despite the fact that they are equally as involved in the adaptation, reutilization, or redefinition as the maker, wearer, and concealer. This person is the finder.

The Concealed Revealed

The concealed revealed is something of an oxymoron, discovery being rather contrary to the deposit's purpose. Once the concealed deposit is found, therefore, it is no longer a concealed deposit and has consequently shifted context yet again, becoming something else entirely. There are, however, several different states the item can enter following discovery, and this is wholly dependent upon the finder. How they perceive and treat their find determines what it becomes in its next 'life'.

Personal anecdotes, with hindsight being all too ineffective, indicate that in many cases the concealed deposit simply becomes rubbish. This generally occurs when the find is viewed as a commonplace object, an 'everyday thing';¹⁵ an unsurprising interpretation considering the forms of most concealed deposits. The unusual nature of their context (e.g. up a chimney, in a wall) may go unnoticed or unremarked upon; it may be interpreted as the result of accidental loss; or it may be considered anomalous: one of those things that simply cannot be made sense of. Either way, the 'everydayness' of many concealed deposits hinders their recognition as items of historic interest, and leads to them being disregarded and discarded.

This can even be the fate of deposits sent to museums or heritage centres, the finders hoping in vain for an explanation to the unusual context of their find. Davies gives an example of this having occurred at the National Museum of Ireland. When a large cache of objects, having been discovered in a bread oven in the 1970s, was donated to the Museum, the curators did not know what to make of it. As with many museums of the time, they were unfamiliar with the custom of concealment – and consequently threw the finds away, realising the significance of the finds only in 2012 when one of the curators learned of the custom at a conference.¹⁶

Knowledge of concealed deposits has since spread, via word-of-mouth, conferences, publications, and online resources. As a result, many curators today are either aware of the

custom or can easily research it, and so when a concealed deposit is donated to a museum, it is more often retained than disposed of. However, this transition – from concealed deposit to accessioned artefact – has its own implications and issues, not least the loss of environmental context, the problematic irony of publicly displaying concealed deposits, and the debates surrounding their restoration. However, these issues are considered in detail elsewhere.¹⁷ This paper is instead concerned with the third option available to a revealed concealed deposit: retention by the private custodian, who experiences a more profound relationship with these deposits through having discovered them within the fabric of their own homes.

While there are no solid statistics to work from, it is safe to claim that many deposits are kept by their finders; Northampton Museum have records of c.1900 concealed shoes in their *Index*, but only 190 (10%) such shoes in their actual collection. What has become of the remaining c.1710 that were reported to Northampton? Did the finders retain them? If so, why? And what exactly did they do with them? The remainder of this paper draws on interviews conducted with finders of concealed deposits, over the course of 2015 and 2016. All quotes, unless otherwise specified, are taken verbatim from audio recordings of these interviews.

The Concealed Revealed, Re-concealed

Writing specifically on concealed shoes, Swann observes: ‘Most people appeared instinctively to put shoes back where they were found’;¹⁸ the concealed revealed, is re-concealed. For example, a child’s shoe found during restorations in the staircase of the Olde Boar’s Head, a 16th-century public house in Middleton, Greater Manchester, was immediately returned to its original place of concealment after the restorations had been completed, and remains there still. Likewise when a cache of boots and shoes were found in Colby Estate in Pembrokeshire, the farmer’s wife demanded that they be boarded up again immediately,¹⁹ while a boot was re-

concealed at Woodchester Mansion, Gloucestershire, having been discovered by workers repairing part of the roof in 2011. Hannah McCanlis, the manager of the estate, spoke of the decision to return the boot to its original spot:

We were told at the time that boots are placed in a roof space like this for luck and to keep the devil from your roof. It would have been nice to keep the boot to show people but tradition won out and the boot was returned – probably not to be seen for another 150 years.²⁰

Animal remains are also often re-concealed by their finders. For example, when builders were renovating a house in Knaresborough, Yorkshire, in 2012, they discovered a dried cat in the wall. Wanting to re-conceal it but too impatient to wait the several weeks before completion of the building work, they buried it elsewhere.²¹ The finder of another dried cat in the wall of a house in Ugborough, Devon, had been told by neighbours that the cat had originally been found in the wall 20 years ago by a past occupant of the house, who had subsequently re-concealed it. In a newspaper interview, the new finder claimed: ‘I cannot throw it away so we plan to put it back on completion of the building work. But my wife is not all that keen on it, as she says she will have bad dreams’.²²

The finder of yet another dried cat in the wall of a house in South Shields, Tyne and Wear, was debating over what to do with her find: ‘It’s not leaving the house... Eventually we might place it in a glass frame next to the door. Or we might put it under the bathroom when we carry out work to renovate that room – back where it came from, so to speak’.²³ Indecision over what to do with a deposit is sometimes solved by way of fragmenting the find: for example, a horse’s jaw-bone discovered in the wall of a 17th-century house in Fulbourn, Cambridgeshire, was split in two by its finder. One half was donated to the Cambridge Folk Museum; the other half was re-deposited in the wall.

These are not just cases of people finding concealed deposits and leaving them *in situ*; they are cases of people actively re-concealing them. To go to the trouble of removing a deposit during

building work and then returning it to its found location once the work is completed are not the actions of an indifferent finder; they imply a certain investment of emotion. Why would a finder choose to re-conceal a deposit – an object that they have never previously seen or used before – rather than dispose of it or donate it to a museum?

One possible explanation is that some finders believe in the efficacy, or the ‘magic’, of these concealed deposits. It was noted above that an abundance of theories surround the original purposes of concealment, but the most common argument is that these deposits were intended to protect a building and its occupants from negative forces, both natural (disease, fire, misfortune) and supernatural (demons, the devil, witches, spirits, fairies). Many finders of concealed deposits are aware of this theory; a minority are familiar with the practice already, whilst most conduct some research on it following discovery (as with most topics, the internet is a popular source of information). Having drawn the conclusion that the deposit was originally intended as a form of supernatural safeguard, are some finders anxious that by removing them they are leaving their homes vulnerable to malevolent threats?

Beliefs are notoriously difficult to write about, impossible as they are to quantify. However, as Davies observes, ‘Although it is not feasible to measure belief itself, it is at least possible to measure the external expression and physical manifestations of some beliefs’.²⁴ Ritual or ‘magical’ objects, and how people engage with them, prove invaluable in our understanding of beliefs,²⁵ so in order to understand what finders believe about the efficacy of concealed deposits, it is necessary to consider how they treat them, how they speak about them, and what they ultimately choose to do with them.

One particularly illustrative example involves a find at a 16th-century farmhouse in Asse-le-Boisne, Normandy, France (Figure 2). In 2010 the owner of the farmhouse, Danny Rippon, the European Director of a digital agency, hired a builder to raise a door lintel in a part of the house

that had originally been a barn; within the wall he discovered a ball of hay wrapped around a child's leather glove and a corked glass bottle containing a feather. Danny and his wife kept the finds out for three days as they discussed what to do with them, and while they did weigh up the option of donating the finds to a local museum, it was their 'gut' feeling that they should re-conceal them – and as soon as possible. They had heard that the cache's deposition was probably 'to do with a belief stopping evil spirits entering your house' and they 'felt very strongly very quickly that we wanted it to be back in the wall where it was uncovered, because it was there for a reason'. And so three days following discovery, the deposits were re-concealed. The builder, apparently equally 'keen to get it back' within the wall, placed it just behind the new keystone while Danny and his family watched on with some ceremony.

Evidently, as Eastop writes, "magic" or "superstition" is generated in the present'.²⁶ By re-concealing these deposits, Danny and his family were perpetuating – and participating in – the culture of beliefs and symbols that motivated the original deposition, even though they did not know what those beliefs and symbols were. In other instances though, concealed deposits are not re-concealed – but their finders are still anxious to keep them close to their original places of discovery. An example of this involves a child's shoe and a number of clay-pipes found in the chimneybreast of The Lamb, a 19th-century public house in Bury, Greater Manchester (Figure 3). They were found in the 1980s during renovation work, and while they were not returned to the chimneybreast, the finders wanted to keep them as close as possible to their place of concealment. So they commissioned a glass-fronted wooden case, placed the finds inside, and displayed them on the mantelpiece above the fireplace.

When Roger Elliott became the landlord of The Lamb in 2013, he was adamant that the shoe and clay-pipes be left in place. A story connecting the finds with a ghost purportedly haunting the pub still circulated from a number of years before, when the finds were moved from the fireplace to the bar; the following morning straw was discovered scattered throughout the pub.

The landlord at the time cleaned up the straw but the following morning it re-appeared, and again, until the shoe and pipes were returned to the fireplace. When questioned by the author, Roger admitted to not believing in ghosts but he likes the theory that shoes were placed up chimneybreasts to protect a house from fire. When asked if he believes it works, he replied, 'No not really,' before reconsidering. 'Well, so far we've not had any bad luck. So in that sense...' He gestured to the pub around him. 'It's still standing.'

The Concealed Revealed, Displaced

In other cases where concealed deposits are temporarily removed from their places of concealment, events transpire that cause the finder to become impatient for their return. Swann recounts a letter from a woman in Hampshire who 'had innocently sent her finds to London for identification. While they were away, the house which had hitherto seemed so benign, had strange noises from the attic room where they were found...She had heard that shoes were put in the chimney to keep out evil, which came in at the highest point' – as soon as she got her finds back, she returned them to their original place of concealment. Swann tells of another finder who reported similar misgivings: 'while the boots were out of the house for exhibition, they had nothing but bad luck, the death of pets, flooding and the shed fell down. They now wished to leave the boots strictly alone, no publicity, no photography'.²⁷

It is not only finders who exhibit anxiety over the displacement of concealed deposits. In 2015 John Prag of Manchester Museum published a paper detailing the unease with which many members of museum staff view a small stone figurine in their collection. The figurine, known as 'Little Mannie', was found under the cellar floor of a building in Hollingworth, Greater Manchester, and was purchased from the finder in 1987; according to Prag, from that point on, 'Things began to happen'.²⁸ Prag's colleagues at Manchester Museum suffered numerous

accidents and misfortunes, from illnesses and injuries to broken car windows and trouser zips, always after handling ‘Little Mannie’. The figurine, displaced from its location of concealment, began to be blamed for these mishaps, which reached such a quantity that even the most sceptical among the museum staff became ‘wary of the little figure’s influences’.²⁹

It is not the purpose of this paper to prove or disprove the efficacy of concealed deposits. Instead, its aim is to demonstrate the emotion invested in them by their contemporary finders. As stated above, belief is impossible to quantify and therefore problematic to write about, but considering the ways in which finders have handled, treated, and spoken about their finds, it is not farfetched to claim that some credence is still given to the efficacy, the ‘magic’ of these objects. This is consistent with the finds of other researchers who have claimed that faith in ‘magical objects’, such as lucky charms, amulets, and talismans, were still prevalent in western society in the latter half of the 20th century.³⁰

It is also consistent with more recent psychological studies which suggest that people are still prone to ‘magical thinking’; that we are instinctively inclined to attribute ‘magical’ causal explanations to events.³¹ If some misfortune occurs soon after a person removes or discards a concealed deposit, then it is easy – and perhaps instinctual – to apply a cause-and-effect process to these two events. It is also perhaps instinctual for a finder to keep a deposit *in situ* or to re-conceal it with the aim of preventing possible misfortune, especially considering the uncertainty and mystery surrounding these objects.

Eastop reports an email sent to the DCGP in 2007 concerning the re-concealment of a shoe in a house in Cookham, Berkshire. The finder claimed, ‘I don’t think what I did [re-concealment] was a superstitious reaction...I think it was more an act of deference to the beliefs of the person who put the shoes there...Perhaps there was also some element of taking no risk of upsetting the existing equilibrium [the good atmosphere of the house]’.³² The finder may not give any

credence to the efficacy of the deposit; they may not believe that its displacement could have any adverse effect, but as the logical mind may ask, why risk it?

This sentiment appears to underpin the actions of Alison Norman, the custodian of a concealed shoe in Geldeston, Norfolk. Having discovered a soft-leather child's shoe wrapped in paper on a ledge up the chimneybreast of her timber-framed farmhouse in c.2010, Alison decided to mount it in a box-frame and hang it beside the fireplace in which it was originally concealed (Figure 4). She describes her motivations for this:

This is because we felt that this best indicated the context in which they had been found and was a reflection of the superstition which may have led to the placement of the shoe. We showed the shoe to a neighbour who was born in the village and he was quite upset that we had removed the shoe from the chimney ledge and suggested that it would be best to replace it. He was very concerned when I suggested that I might take it to Gressenhall Museum for them to see and told me that removing it from the house would be very bad luck. It is interesting that, although I don't regard myself as superstitious in any way, I have never got round to making an appointment at the museum!³³

Contemporary finders would not need to identify themselves as believers in magic in order to react in such ways; they can be entirely rational, scientifically-minded individuals. As Luhrmann and Lloyd note, people from all backgrounds and professions can exhibit 'magical' mentalities under the right circumstances, from pub landlords and conservation officers to media relations managers and directors of digital agencies.³⁴ As Lloyd advocates, in order to understand magic in the modern world we must be willing to attribute a 'plurality of mentalities to a single individual'.³⁵ Even somebody who eschews superstition can believe, on some level, in the supramundane.

'A Part of the House'

Belief in a concealed deposit's efficacy may have motivated retention or re-concealment in some cases, but interviews with finders flagged another, additional sentiment: a sense of obligation and heritage protection. When Phil Bradley discovered the skeletal remains of a cat under the hearthstone of his farmhouse in Deanscales, Cumbria, keeping it in its original place of concealment 'seemed to be the right thing to do I think. It had been there for 200 years plus maybe...so it just seemed right to put this little skeleton back'. Likewise when Phil found a cache of fragmented objects (a salt croc, a glass, spectacles, and a clay-pipe) within the wall beside the fireplace, these items also 'went back in because that felt the right thing to do as well. You don't know what to do with them. It's a broken glass but you can't just stop it in the bin, can you? ...We couldn't.'

There is a sense that the concealed deposits belong in – and to – the building of their original concealment. This is why many are not donated to museums, and also why many finders are adamant that they would keep the deposit in the house even if they themselves relocated.³⁶ Roger Elliott, landlord of The Lamb (see above) was emphatic in his assertion that he would not take the shoe with him if he vacated the pub: 'No, no, no. That is part of the pub...It's in its original place. It's where it should be.' The same sentiment was expressed by Kate Armitage, the custodian of a concealed shoe in Ilkley, Yorkshire, which had been discovered up the chimneybreast and re-concealed by the previous home-owner (Figure 5). Ms. Armitage removed it from the chimneybreast and displayed it on a shelf above the fireplace, as close as possible to its original place of concealment whilst still being on show. The shoe was secreted there for a reason, she believes, and as unfathomable as that reason may be to her, she does not want it removed: it is 'a part of the house'.

Returning to Laura, the custodian of the concealed shoe near Norwich. She expressed the same opinion: 'I wouldn't let it too far out of my sights. I would let it go to good academic use but it would have to remain here and I think if we ever sold the house I think it would have to stay

with the house because it's just part of it.' This corresponds to Davies' observation that some finders are motivated by 'the need to maintain an emotional relationship with the identity of the house and its purpose to protect the latest of its custodians. Not to re-deposit the apotropaic objects would be to disturb the spiritual or emotional balance that creates that vague, intangible sense of a happy home'.³⁷ This notion of balance was touched upon by the finder/re-concealer of the Cookham shoe, who claimed that there was 'some element of taking no risk of upsetting the existing equilibrium'.³⁸

This desire to maintain the 'good atmosphere of the house' goes beyond notions of self-protection, with finders often claiming that they would leave the deposits in the house if they ever moved away. This attitude was expressed by Adele Yeomans of Mains Hall Manor, Lancashire. In 2005/6 she discovered a wooden staff etched with symbols (possibly a rudimentary imitation of a clog-almanac or runic calendar) within the wattle-and-daub wall of an upstairs room. The staff is displayed on the fireplace in her study (Figure 6); interestingly she was not tempted to re-conceal it: 'It's fallen out and it deserves to stay out now'. When asked if she would take the staff with her if she relocated, she was fairly sure 'it would have to stay', but was concerned that the new owners would not 'feel the same attachment' to it as she did and would simply dispose of it. 'Maybe I'd conceal it and go,' she concluded. This is exactly what Danny Rippon did when he moved out of his Normandy farmhouse in 2011; he left the bottle and child's glove *in situ* 'so that any...spirits that it'd captured or any power that it held was still being kept with the house where it belonged and where it was originally intended.'

As well as the notion that the concealed deposit belongs in/to the building, in a form of heritage protection, there is also a sentiment of obligation towards the original concealer. Returning to the email reported by Eastop concerning re-concealment in Cookham; the finder of a shoe claimed that re-concealing it was primarily 'an act of deference to the beliefs of the person who

put the shoes there'. The general consensus appears to be that whatever function these deposits served, they were concealed for a reason and that reason should be respected, whether or not the finder gives any credence to its efficacy. Similarly Phil Bradley asserted that he and his partner re-concealed the cat beneath the hearthstone 'out of respect for what had been done with it originally...I thought who are we to disrupt that? I don't think we had any feelings that we'd have a bad curse or anything like that. It just felt to both of us the right thing to do.'

Similar sentiments are expressed by Griselda and Alan Garner, who found a cache of concealed shoes – amongst many other deposits – in Toad Hall, a medieval timber-framed building and the Garners' home since the 1950s. These shoes are stored in a box in the room directly below the roof space in which they were discovered; they are not displayed and are shown only to those visitors with an academic interest in them. Alan Garner eloquently articulates their attitude towards these concealed deposits:

caches are as much a part of the 'life' of a house as the material fabric and should be preserved as discrete entities respecting and representing the spiritual beliefs of the people that were here before us, even if we can't know what those beliefs were. To remove a cache is to diminish and deplete a place as much as it would be to remove a structural timber.³⁹

Many finders also express a deep curiosity about the original concealers and their motivations. Speaking of the etched staff found in Mains Hall Manor, Adele Yeomans admitted, 'I'd love to know whoever did it, why they did it, what they thought they were doing'. Likewise Danny Rippon claimed curiosity as his primary reaction to the discovery of the bottle and glove: 'I wonder who on earth ever wore the glove? Did this glove belong to somebody who had helped build the house and maybe there were children involved in building the house? Or maybe it was somebody's child that had died, that they put in as a memento for them...lots and lots of questions'.

Generating Networks

The discovery of a concealed deposit evidently sparks curiosity about the person who originally secreted it away. The deposit itself thereby acts as a form of nodal point between concealer and finder – in much the same way as a house acts as mediator between past and present occupants. This is a notion that needs further investigation if we are to understand the relationship generated between concealer and finder via the concealed deposit.

Houses are more than strategically-placed piles of bricks; they are both central to, and reflections of, their occupants.⁴⁰ They are, in a sense, an extension of the person; a ‘second skin’.⁴¹ Indeed, the notion of the anthropomorphised or embodied house, as an analogy of the human body, is both long-standing and widespread.⁴² As Vickery writes: ‘Unglazed holes in the earliest primitive houses were known as the wind eye, the origin of our window. If windows were eyes, the doors represented the mouth, vagina or anus, and the hearth the breast, heart, soul or womb. Apertures symbolized points of human vulnerability’.⁴³ And just as the house was a metaphor for the person, an attack on the house was perceived as an attack on the person.

Johnson observes that, ‘A focus on dwelling brings into focus how the material form of the house and the social form of the household [the occupants] mutually created each other’.⁴⁴ However, a house tends to have more than one set of occupants; some span generations of the same family whilst others see numerous relocators, all of whom become bound in the history and identity of that house. Houses therefore are, as Jones notes, ‘relational entities linked through complex networks’;⁴⁵ networks of inhabitants, both past and present. This is why new occupants tend to be curious about the history of their homes, the people who inhabited them previously, and the events that took place there – because they signify a network that the new occupants are becoming a part of. The new occupant is aware that, as Hockey writes: ‘Moving

into a new home means moving into the spaces that housed the hidden...aspects of other people's lives'.⁴⁶ Rogerson encapsulates this notion succinctly: 'The house is not a 'virgin'''.⁴⁷

This awareness does not always have a positive impact; past events may have occurred that leave a place 'polluted'. Hence the popular concept of the haunted house, which, according to Janicker, demonstrates how 'the past lingers to inform and shape the present';⁴⁸ the house is an ambiguous, dynamic space bound up in both the past and the present; with both the living and the dead.⁴⁹ However, the haunted house is not only a horror-story motif. It can occur when past occupants and events metaphorically stain a house to the extent that nobody is willing to occupy it. This explains why the homes of serial killers, such as Fred and Rosemary West, and Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, are demolished rather than re-occupied. People do not want to be bound up in such polluted networks of occupation. Such cases of lingering pollution are rare though, and many people view their house's history with enthusiasm and curiosity; as Hockey observes, the 'ghosts of previous occupants may...be part of the attraction of pre-twentieth-century property'.⁵⁰

Greater enthusiasm and curiosity is sparked when the house proffers material evidence of past occupants, i.e. items left behind. Such items can prove particularly potent mediators between past and present occupants. Siân Lincoln observes that homes 'can be understood as material spaces in which historical trails are left all over the places'.⁵¹ These historical or 'residual' trails can manifest themselves materially in the form of, for example, old wallpaper, layers of paint, posters, objects left in attics or sheds – and, of course, concealed deposits.

Sometimes these residual trails are removed by the new inhabitant (wallpaper is stripped, walls are painted over, objects are discarded), but in some instances they are retained and rearticulated, and as Lincoln writes, 'When 'renaturalized' into a contemporary context these "things" take on new, alternative meanings'.⁵² The concealed deposit is one such material

manifestation of a residual trail, which is either disposed of when discovered or it takes on new, alternative meanings when re-concealed or displayed. However, regardless of whether it is discarded or retained, once a concealed deposit is discovered, it generates a network of occupation, a ‘web of connection’ to use McBryde’s phrase,⁵³ mediated by the house and the deposit. More than this though, it testifies to a ‘collective experience’ of space shared by past and present occupants; a collective experience that engenders an enchained relationship.⁵⁴

Enchainment through Concealment

‘Human relationships have a materiality,’ posit Robb and Pauketet, referring to the notion of enchainment, whereby people are linked by their engagement with material things.⁵⁵ This is a theory put forward by anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, who notes that objects act as nodal points within webs of connection, flowing between people to create mutual enchainments.⁵⁶ It was John Chapman, however, whose seminal work on personhood in the prehistoric Balkans fully demonstrated the potential of material objects to mediate relations between people through space and time.⁵⁷ In the case of the concealed deposit, therefore, the contemporary finder and original concealer are mutually enchained across time via their engagement with the concealed deposit.

This was the case when Nici Ruggiero and Peter Miller found a cache of concealed deposits in their 18th-century cottage in Water End, Hertfordshire (Figure 7). Having moved into the cottage in 1999 they began renovations, almost immediately discovering a large cache consisting of shoes, bottles, a hat, newspaper sheets, pot lids, and various other items, within the wall separating the lounge from the kitchen. Although already interested in local history, this find sparked in Nici and Peter a curiosity about their house’s past occupants and a desire to research the people who may have originally concealed the cache. ‘That’s the thing I find

really fascinating,' Peter enthused, 'it just links you with someone directly from the past, doesn't it? I mean these are objects that were familiar to them, hats and shoes and things.'

Nici and Peter seek some insight into the 'mind-set' of the original concealers. Interpreting the finds as apotropaic devices, Nici observes that the concealers 'did fear quite a bit' and she has a theory about what it was they specifically feared: a woman named Rebecca Samms, who had been listed as a retired laundress in the 1901 census and who was also the purported local 'village witch' of Water End. Nici suggested that the concealers of this cache were hoping to 'ward off curses from the witch'. The pot lids, for example, could have been concealed for their association with 'kettling', the banging on pots and pans to drive a witch away; a custom which, according to a 92-year-old neighbour, Rebecca Samms had been subjected to in the early 1900s. A piece of rope was concealed which Nici believes may have been to 'catch these black witch curses', while the scissors alongside it may have been concealed because they were sharp and could have been used 'to spear anything that came in'. The desire to understand the purposes of such concealments has, in this case, led to a crafting of narratives which make sense of the fears and beliefs of the concealers themselves.

Phil Bradley, finder of the cat skeleton in Deanscales, Cumbria, likewise admitted, 'I'm trying to put myself in the mind of the people who did this'. And returning again to Laura: she expressed a similar desire to understand – and to justify – the motivations of her shoe's original depositor:

The flipside of [living in an old house] is that you never know what you're going to find. I just couldn't believe my luck when I walked in on that summer's day and here was this incredible relic of another time. And I think the more I thought about it, the more I thought what on earth would have compelled someone to take – I'm assuming it was someone who lived here, it belonged to them – to take a very well-worn piece of their wardrobe – I mean it's got holes all here, it's been patched up, it's got holes in the heel – and think, 'I know, I'm going to put that in an area where evil spirits might penetrate the household and do bad things. This is going to protect me'...someone instilled a real belief in this protecting them and protecting their

family. If that's what they thought, you know, who are we to criticise that? It's a valid thing. It's as valid to them however many hundreds of years ago as it is to us to have the beliefs we believe today

An enchainment relationship is formed when the finders, inspired by their discovery of a concealed deposit, attempt to enter the mind-set of the concealers. In the endeavour to understand what emotions and intentions may have led to deposition – 'fear', 'superstition', 'belief', 'protection' – contemporary finders are engaging with the past in an empathetic depth that eludes many historians. In this way, concealer, finder, and deposit are 'bundled' together, to use an archaeological term,⁵⁸ inextricably entangled despite the decades, even centuries, separating them.

Concluding Remarks

Joe Moran writes of an object's 'unplanned afterlife'. This occurs when a commonplace object from the past is brought into the present quite by accident, as opposed to the items intentionally preserved by family members, museums, collectors, and antique dealers. Such objects are, according to Moran, 'interesting as repositories of everyday experience because they do not follow the conventional logic of market value, antiquarian interest or personal nostalgia'.⁵⁹ In the case of concealed deposits, which – considering the natures of their concealments and discoveries – are certainly brought into the present by accident, their unplanned afterlives are particularly interesting because of their potential to elucidate how people today engage with the past.

For example, the concealed deposit calls into question the applicability of the *termini ad quem* historians often set for themselves. Its biography does not end at its moment of concealment; transferred to a different physical and theoretical context, it is ritually recycled. The shoe, for instance, is no longer footwear but has become a concealed deposit, given a particular agency

by the depositor through the act of concealment – an agency that continues beyond the life of the concealer. As Lynn Meskell argues, ‘just because something is not on public view, is buried or cached...does not necessarily mean that the object is not *working*, not active or even agentic’.⁶⁰

However, even when the concealed deposit is discovered its agency continues, acting upon its finder and generating both a range of emotions – curiosity, attachment, anxiety, even fear – and an enchainment relationship between them and its original concealer. Whether the contemporary finder believes in the deposit’s efficacy or not, they are still entangled, ‘bundled’, with both it and its concealer. And just as much as the deposit impacts its finder, it is impacted *by* its finder; following discovery, the deposit is rearticulated, given new meaning and new significance by those who engage with it.

As Chris Fowler observes, ‘Artefacts, like people, are multiply-authored’.⁶¹ The concealed deposit is a product not just of its maker, but of its user, concealer, and contemporary finder; and in its multiple authorship it creates a chain of relations between these individuals that, as Erina Gruner observes, ‘go beyond the intentionality of the person who originally constructed them’.⁶² In conclusion, therefore, as the concealed deposit’s biography does not end at its moment of concealment or its moment of discovery, our examination of it should not end there either.

Figures

Figure 1 – The shoe found by Laura up the chimneybreast of her Norfolk house (Photograph by M. Norman)

Figure 2 – The bottle containing a feather and the child’s glove found above the doorway of a barn conversion in Asse-le-Boisne, Normandy, France. Re-concealed (Photograph by D. Rippon)

Figure 3 – The shoe found up the chimney of the Lamb pub, Bury, England. Currently on display above the fireplace (Photograph by author)

Figure 4 – The child’s shoe found up the chimney of a timber-framed farmhouse in Geldeston, Norfolk, displayed alongside the paper in which it was wrapped in a box frame beside the fireplace (Photograph by A. Norman)

Figure 5 – The child’s shoe found up the chimney on a farmhouse in Ilkley, Yorkshire, England. Currently on display above the fireplace (Photograph by author)

Figure 6 – The engraved staff found within the wall of Mains Hall Manor, Lancashire, England. Currently on display above the fireplace (Photograph by author)

Figure 7 – The Water End Cache, found within the wall and under the floorboards of a cottage in Water End, Hertfordshire, England. (Photograph by author)

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